

Environment Committee, March 3, 2010

Testimony of David Bingham in support of Raised Bill 5417 with modifications

Speaking as co-chair of The CT League of Conservation Voters on behalf of its constituent groups, including:

1000 Friends of CT, CARE, CT Forest & Park, CT Fund for the Environment, CT Land Conservation Coalition, Environment Connecticut, Environmental Justice, Land Trust Alliance, PACE, Rivers Alliance, Sierra Club and the Working Lands Alliance, among others.

House Bill 5417 contains three separate proposals, 2 good but 1 not so good.

Section 1 (very good) proposes a statewide registry of protected open space and farmland. This is a welcome idea, necessary for proper planning, stewardship, and monitoring to achieve the State's wildlife, land and forest conservation goals.

Section 2 (very good) incorporates the Community Green Fund proposal. This section would allow communities the local option of imposing a 1% conveyance on buyers of real estate, to provide a dedicated local "green fund" to pay for projects for conservation of land, farms, brownfield remediation, air and water quality, and energy conservation.

However, the language of this section should be clarified to ensure that it encompasses these conservation goals. This bill provides for a key local funding stream to leverage grants and to encourage smart growth and sustainable communities. Note that cleanup of brownfields, retrofitting of diesels, improving buildings for energy efficiency, sewage treatment, and alternative transportation all are labor-intensive conservation projects, "green jobs" that could be paid for with a community green fund.

Moreover, local funds will often leverage private, state and federal matching grants for enhancing the community benefit. This is "smart growth" at its best, community based but with regional downstream benefits of air and water quality, energy conservation, and a deterrence of sprawl. There are excellent examples of this popular approach to funding conservation in all of our neighboring states (NY, RI, MA). Conveyance fees there are at "up to 2 %," and a consistent fee amount in CT would be more appropriate to the task.

Section 3 of this bill is a problem, and should be deleted. It requires an overburdened DEP to locate and set up ATV trails in State Forests or parklands. While it would require ATV's and snowmobiles that are registered to have their registrations displayed visibly (a good thing), it does not require all of them to be registered. Funding from the registration fees does not come close to the expenses related to proper trail creation and maintenance. The DEP has much higher priorities at this time, and this proposal should be postponed.

In summary, CTLCV strongly supports HB 5417, with the proviso that section 3 be deleted.